



Connecticut State Dental Association

**Legislative Testimony
SB 843 AA Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning
Social Services**

Human Services Committee

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President-Elect, CT State Dental Association

My name is Dr. Bruce Tandy. I am a private practice general dentist in Vernon and Coventry. I am also the President-Elect of the Connecticut State Dental Association. Please accept this as my testimony in regards to the Governor's proposed budget cuts as contained in Governor's Bill 843.

Access to oral health care in Connecticut has been problematic since I entered practice 30 years ago. The State of Connecticut had in place a Medicaid program that provided limited benefits to those who qualified. The reimbursement rates and a failure of the target population to seek, schedule, and follow-up on the appointed care were not the only issues, with huge administrative difficulties keeping the number of participating health care providers low. Many of those that did provide care did so without seeking reimbursement, eliminating the administrative difficulties and helping where they could.

Two years ago, following the settlement of a 7 year lawsuit to increase Medicaid reimbursements for children under the age of 21, a move in a positive direction occurred. The suit allocated dollars and cents, streamlined administration for the dental providers, provided educational programs for the target population, and added case workers to manage patient flow. Dentist participation increased to over 500 private practitioners and 200 public health dentists and hygienists. The target population was children but dentists were also seeing the adults that needed care along with their youngsters, though being reimbursed at half the children's Medicaid rate. There was now a positive change in the access to oral health care problem in Connecticut.

However, the present financial crisis in the state has put huge constraints on the ability of state government to serve the needs of the citizens of Connecticut. The Governor's budget cuts out all dollars except for emergency oral health care treatment for adult Medicaid patients. This is the population that may need oral health care treatment the most. At the Connecticut Mission of Mercy event last April, the dental team treated 1250 people,

many of whom were adults in the category that will be most effected by these proposed cuts. Many of these patients will wind up seeking care in emergency rooms of hospitals, a much more costly option than dentist offices or safety net facilities that can no longer afford to treat this target population with the loss of the limited Medicaid dollars.

The second untenable piece of this budget is the additional hurdle requiring preauthorization for non emergency services provided under DSS dental programs. As noted previously, administrative issues were a limiting factor as much as dollars and cents issues for providers. With the lawsuit settlement, these barriers were removed and the subsequent increase in providers is a testament to the importance of this issue. The institution of this language will result in the loss of providers who will find this requirement unworkable on the day to day basis of running a dental practice. This may reduce the utilization of DSS dollars, but shifting the gains in access to care into the more costly emergency room facilities of the state is a bad choice.

With the increasing unemployment numbers, there will be more individuals seeking state help through the Medicaid program than ever before. To cut these dollars now when the need is greatest is not what I believe government is about. The dentists have stepped up to the plate to improve the oral health of this population through the MOM project, increased participation in Medicaid, developing public education programs with CPTV, and joining in the Home by One pilot project. Oral health has been shown to not only effect the mouth, but the overall health of the individual. The cost in the future to repair the oral and physical health of the citizens of Connecticut by failing to prevent and treat health problems now, will ultimately be a financial quagmire, especially as the debate on universal health care begins. Government needs to do its part and not put off the higher costs to another day.

Please reconsider these budget cuts and administrative hurdles and reinstate the dollars and streamlined paperwork which are an investment in the health of the citizens we serve.

Thank-you.

Respectfully Submitted,
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